

Troping the Asylum

In footnotes to the above passages Dr. Campbell records his objections to the sexual connotations of terms like "excitement" for what he regards as galvanism's "vitalizing influence." The use of such "loaded" terms, with all their sexual connotations, is to him the biased sensationalization, based on misunderstanding, of a valid medical treatment by hostile and recalcitrant professionals "none of whom probably could tell the difference between the action of the positive and negative poles" of the apparatus employed (vii). Dr. Campbell also objects that he never ascribed Mary's madness to religious excitement, but vice versa, and that Dr. Workman has misquoted his original statement, which was that Mary had difficulty at her menstrual periods; he regards the semantic shift from "difficulty" to "suppression," as "all-important in its bearing towards the close" (vii).

The subsequent autopsy reveals, not surprisingly, abnormalities with "the organs of generation":

highly congested, particularly the left ovary, and the posterior surface of the fundus of the uterus. The uterus was about 3 inches long from its fundus to the edge of the os. Its cavity was normal in dimension and its structure normal. (viii)

More significantly, it indicates "the hymen almost obliterated" (viii). While Drs. Richardson and Berryman testify to the medical impropriety of applying galvanic electricity to reduce congestion, it is obvious that they regard the introduction of any instrument into the vagina of an unmarried woman as highly improper.

Finally, several nurses testify that during their close attendance on Mary, she exhibited no signs of religious excitement but indicated that the source of her illness was Dr. Campbell's son, Posie," to whom "she believed she was in the family way" (ix). To one nurse Mary relates how Dr. Campbell and his son "took her into a room and gave her medicine that burnt the inside out of her" (ix).

The "Incomplete" Article from the "Telegraph" of May 9